UNGEI in East and Southern Africa
Implementation Report January – June 2009

Introduction:
A recent ESAR report states: ‘Gender mainstreaming in programmes is most predominantly conveyed in Education’.

The above statement reflects the long standing efforts and commitment to girls’ education in ESAR, since 1994, with the launch of African Girls’ Education Initiative. The UNICEF MTSP questionnaire of 2008, indicates also that all COAR in ESAR address gender in their education programmes.

However, there are 11.4 million children who are not enrolled in primary schools, these children represent the last 10 – 15% population who are hard to each and are excluded from the system. The figure represents girls, orphaned and other vulnerable children (OVC) who bear the negative impact of HIV and AIDS, children affected by armed conflicts and natural disasters, children with special needs, children from nomadic/pastoralist communities, and children from poor households in remote rural areas.

Consequently, UNGEI ESAR supported the study on the excluded/out-of-school children which revealed 0.99 as the regional average of the gender parity index for primary net enrolment. Although this figure indicates that parity has almost been achieved, upon deeper analysis this regional average conceals the different gender gaps that exist not only at country level but also within different regions in a country. At the regional level, on one hand we find that girls are disadvantaged in Comoros, Eritrea, Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia, while on the other hand boys are disadvantaged in Namibia, Lesotho, Botswana and Malawi.

Various reasons contribute to these disparities which include barriers found at household, community, school and policy level. However, even in cases where children face common obstacles, the way they manifest is different. For instance, conflict displaces girls and boys alike; however, the impact of the conflict on boys in Northern Uganda has been in the form of recruitment as combatants, while girls have been more often kidnapped as sex slaves. Furthermore, even though socio-cultural and traditional beliefs determine the accepted marriage age, we find that there are more girls than boys that drop out of school due to early marriage.

The overall trend in ESAR depicts that while access to education remains an issue in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Comoros in the remaining countries, it is not so much a question of access but one of retention of learners within the system. Against this backdrop and in order to provide education opportunities for all girls and boys in ESAR, it is imperative that the political climate is conducive and supportive of education in general and of girls’ education in particular. However, it is worth noting that there has been a donor fatigue with regards to funding girls’ education initiatives, thus it is critical that UNGEI ESAR strategically places issues of girls’ education within a broader framework such as the ‘including the excluded’ agenda, gender sensitive teacher curriculum training and also intersectorally with issues related to child protection.
1. Reducing gender disparities:
Continued work towards more policy-oriented initiatives and upstream work, has led to the establishment of an increasing number of Education SWAs which have proved to increase the focus on girls’ education and also place girls’ issues within the broader gender framework. The formulation of gender in education policies has been greatly encouraged, last year three countries namely, Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda approved their gender in education policies. Burundi has recently approved an integrated multi-sectoral policy on girls’ education. Although this is a significant achievement, there needs to be greater emphasis on incorporating girls’ issues within a broader and more comprehensive gender framework. This has led to intensifying efforts in building the capacity of national counterparts in ensuring that the education system is gender sensitive, this has been carried out in almost all of the ESAR countries.

1.1 Gender Audits
Data provided from gender audits reflect the existing gaps and assists in guiding policy discussions. Originally launched in 2007, gender audits have since been carried out in Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Lesotho, Eritrea, Tanzania and Zambia. More importantly, gender audits are now aligned with the MTR and are being used when updating the SitAn, for FTI appraisal and alignment of gender policies.

1.2 Readmission Policy
Malawi has continued to take a pioneering role in facilitating access and ensuring completion through enforcing the 1993, readmission policy for young mothers and fathers. Zambia has also started implementation of a similar policy with Tanzania showing promising signs of soon adopting a similar policy. Both Malawi and Zambia are in the process of evaluating the readmission policy and preliminary findings highlight that there is still social stigma associated with young mothers returning to school, thus calling for stronger participation from communities in order to effectively implement the policy.

1.3 Gender and HIV
Taking into account the effect of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the region, innovative strategies have been used in incorporating gender into HIV/AIDS preventive materials in Angola, Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Namibia considering that young girls are more affected by HIV and AIDS. Of particular interest is Swaziland, where this issue is being tackled through Children’s Peer Activities for in and out of school children on HIV, gender and life skills education issues.

2. Updates on UNGEI ESAR Partnership:
At regional level, FAWE has been the main anchor of our partnership. Last year, UNGEI ESAR together with FAWE, started the implementation of the Gender Responsive Education Programme project in Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi and Zimbabwe.

3. Updates of country UNGEI Partnerships:
At country level, much has been done in collaboration with the respective national chapters of FAWE in the countries. Most recently, a FAWE branch has been established in Somalia’s Puntland which is assisting over 20 national NGOs to promote quality basic education for girls. In Uganda, FAWE has been an active partner in UNGEI as co-chair of the national task force headed by the Ministry of Education and also devolved to the communities.
Partnerships with national counterparts, NGOs and sister UN agencies have also helped the expansion of GEM/ GEBM in Botswana, Lesotho, South Africa and Uganda. A commendable initiative has been in Madagascar where together with FAWE, junior high school girls are being hosted in a dormitory to permit the schooling of girls who come from remote and poor households. The girls are academically and morally supported by permanent personnel, as well as by FAWE mentors.

3.1 Case study: Zambia

Zambia has over the last fifteen year intensified its efforts aimed at enhancing the education of girls. In its 1996 Policy of “Education Our Future” the Ministry of Education committed itself to eliminating gender disparities within the education system. To realize this, Ministry of Education put in place some programmes aimed at promoting girl’s education. It first started with the launch of the Programme for the Advancement of Girl’s Education (PAGE) in 1994 and followed by the launch of the ‘Go Girls Campaign’ in 2004. As of 2007, there were nearly 300,000 children of school going age out of school; two thirds of them are girls. Recent studies have shown that despite a decrease in urban poverty, there has been a noticeable increase in rural poverty which adversely affects the opportunities for girls to access and complete a cycle of primary education.

A CAMFED baseline survey carried out in 2008 has highlighted that classrooms in Zambia are gendered, with more boys than girls being comfortable with speaking in class. Furthermore, the baseline also raises concerns that child abuse and SGBV are widely practiced. This clearly emphasizes the importance of ensuring community participation and eventual ownership of girls’ education initiatives and also of aligning girls’ education within broader issues of child protection.

Conclusion:

UNGEI activities in ESAR have included initiatives such as establishing UNGEI Task Forces in over 10 countries in the region, embedding gender in SWAPs, using FTI funds for girls’ education, mainstreaming gender in education policies, encouraging gender budgeting not only in the education sector but in other sectors as well, conducting gender audits on national education policies and using the Girls’ Education Movement (GEM) to empower girls.

In order to sustain UNGEI initiatives in the future and taking into account the obvious donor fatigue in girls’ education, UNGEI ESAR is moving towards the natural alignment of girls’ issues within broader frameworks that ensures a holistic delivery of services to improve the overall education system.

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